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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

02-277

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February 3, 2003

Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20541

Chairman Michael K. Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Via Fax: 202418-2801

Re: Docker #02-277

Dear Chairman Powell:

We **are** writing to make **you** aware of **our** serious concerns regarding changes to current media ownership rules under consideration by the Federal Communications Commission's Media Bureau. Lifting current media ownership limits will have a drastic impact on the independence, accuracy and diversity of national and local media and could severely limit an individual's access to multiple sources of information.

The elimination of the media ownership rules merits a thorough and complete examination by the public. What is at stake here is no less than the availability of information on which people can make political and economic decisions. A free and independent media lies at the very heart of our democracy, but the rules your agency may overturn will have the practical effect of destroying our fundamental rights.

Despite the magnitude of this decision, the FCC has failed to adequately publicize what is at stake. Most Americans have no idea that such sweeping change is under consideration. Furthermore, your agency has failed to create sufficient opportunities for public involvement in this process. This leaves the impression that the FCC would like to see the changes to media ownership rules codified as quickly and quietly as possible, allowing for input only from the major corporate media outlets -- the regulations' prime beneficiaries.

That so little attention has been paid by the mass media to this issue should come as no surprise and, in fact, offers a perfect example of how the weakening of media ownership rules over the past 20 years has already impacted news content. Only a handful of news outlets have reported on this proposal, most of which published their first stories on the issue last week at the end of

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the public comment period. The major media corporations have much to gain from overturning what remains of the media ownership rules, and nothing to gain from airing the concerns of media watchdogs and concerned citizens.

The media ownership rules you would overturn were enacted in the 1940s in response to conditions in Europe, when totalitarian regimes used their domination of the news media to propel their countries into war. At that time, the United States government recognized the critical importance of an independent and diverse media. Sensibly, it enacted media ownership rules to ensure that the power to inform the public would not be concentrated among a relative few. Strong media ownership rules are just as necessary today, as our national economy is increasingly controlled by a small number of corporations.

The relaxation of ownership rules in the past two decades has already led to an unacceptable number of mergers in the media industry. Several major players now control the majority of news outlets and news content. The example of radio provides clear proof of this trend. Since the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, there are at least 1,100 fewer radio station owners, a decline of nearly 30 percent in six years. In almost half of the largest markets, the three largest corporations control 80 percent of the radio audience.

A public opinion survey conducted by the Consumer Federation of America revealed that two-thirds of Americans think media corporations are already too big and provide too little coverage of local events and public affairs. The relaxation of media ownership limits, however, ignores the public's concerns by allowing even further consolidation of the media industry by large conglomerates, including many whose primary business is not media ownership. General Electric's ownership of NBC and the Walt Disney Company's ownership of ABC provide prominent examples of this phenomenon.

When major corporations with diverse interests in other segments of the economy own all of the major news outlets, the conflicts of interest are inherent, obvious and extremely dangerous. While the news media provide a critical public service in reporting on the actions of our government, they also play a role, just as important, in providing a check against the corporations that control our economy. Inevitably, the media's accuracy in fulfilling this role will be compromised by its ownership. As the corporations' market shares increase, the conflict becomes more dramatic. With the U.S. economy still reeling from the effects of recent corporate scandals, it is shocking that the FCC would allow some of these same corporations to control the public's access to information.

The fundamental principal of free speech and the crucial role played by the media in a free democracy are in serious jeopardy if the FCC moves forward with this process. Easing ownership rules seems to be far more skewed toward ensuring the continued profitability of a handful of highly influential corporations than it is with the public interest. In exchange for the free use of our public spectrum, the media have a responsibility to serve the public good. The FCC should not relieve these conglomerates of their most basic responsibility. It is imperative that the media ownership rules which have served our democracy well for sixty years be continued and be strictly enforced by the FCC.


— The FCC must reconsider its efforts to lead the nation down such a dangerous path and must open the process to further public comment and scrutiny. It is an outrage that the FCC expects to make a decision with such profound and irrevocable consequences on the basis of two public hearings. Extending the regulatory process to allow for a series of public hearings across the country is the minimum the FCC must do to ensure the fairness of the process. If the FCC is responsive to the public will, not just to corporations, it will preserve the current media ownership rules.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



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 Member of Congress


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 Member of Congress



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 Member of Congress

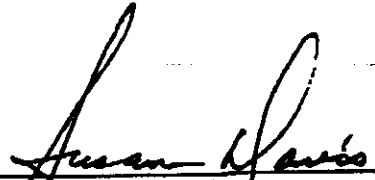

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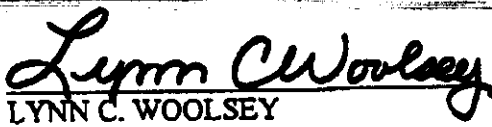

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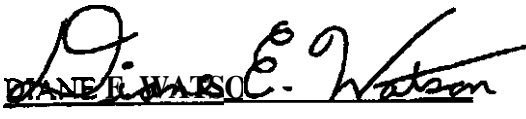

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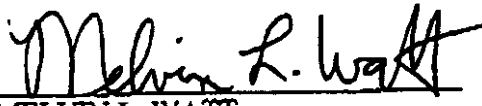

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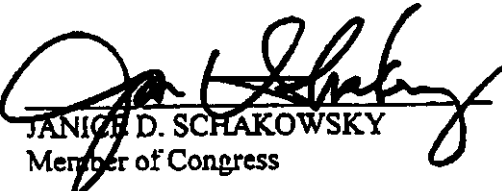

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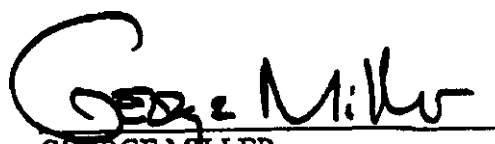

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